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Message Text

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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 CAIRO 02558

EXDIS (HANDLE AS NODIS)

JERUSALEM FOR USDEL ATHERTON

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, EG, US
SUBJECT: SADAT AND USG--AN INCIPIENT CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE

SUMMARY: FOR PAST WEEK OR MORE WE HAVE BEEN RECEIVING INDICATIONS THAT SADAT'S CURRENT DISPLEASURE PROMPTED NOT ONLY BY BEGIN, BUT ALSO BY GROWING UNHAPPINESS ABOUT USG ROLE. OFFICIAL, PRIVATE AND PRESS CRITICISM OF USG INCREASING. BELIEF EXISTS THAT USG NOT GIVING THE TYPE OF ACTIVE SUPPORT WHICH SADAT BELIEVES PRESIDENT CARTER PROMISED AT ASWAN AND EARLIER AND ALSO BECAUSE OF NEW ARMS SALES TO ISRAEL. AN INCIPIENT CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE BETWEEN SADAT AND USG SEEMS TO BE IN MAKING. THERE IS ALWAYS SOMETHING OF A COMMUNICATIONS PROBLEM WITH SADAT, BUT I BELIEVE HIS IMMEDIATE CONCERN IS WHAT HE REGARDS AS LACK OF SUFFICIENTLY STRONG USG SUPPORT ON SINAI SETTLEMENTS ISSUE AND TIMING OF F-16/F-15 OFFER TO ISRAEL. UNLESS CHECKED, WE COULD BE AT TURNING POINT IN US/EGYPTIAN RELATIONS. WE HAVE ASSETS HERE BUT WHAT SADAT WANTS IS A DEMONSTRABLE EFFORT ON OUR PART THAT WE ARE SUPPORTING HIM IN FACT, NOT JUST IN WORDS, EVEN IF IT MEANS
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ANTAGONIZING ISRAELIS AT TIMES. STRONG U.S. SUPPORT FOR SADAT ON SINAI SETTLEMENTS AND SOME KIND OF COMPENSATING ARMAMENTS WILL HELP. SO WILL ARRIVING AT ACCEPTABLE DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES. END SUMMARY.

1. FOR PAST WEEK OR SO WE HAVE BEEN RECEIVING INCREASING SIGNALS THAT SADAT'S CURRENT BLUE FUNK MOOD IS CAUSED NOT

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ONLY BY BEGIN, BUT ALSO REFLECTS UNHAPPINESS WITH USG ROLE IN ARAB/ISRAELI DISPUTE. KNOWLEDGE OF THIS HAS SEEPED OUT OF THE PRESIDENCY, PROBABLY LESS BY DESIGN THAN BY THE LEAKY NATURE OF THAT OFFICE. AS RESULT, IN THIS COUNTRY WHERE PUBLIC OPINION IS FECKLESS AND CAN SHIFT OVERNIGHT, THERE HAS BEEN A NOTICEABLE INCREASE IN PUBLIC AND PRESS QUESTIONING OF THE U.S. ROLE. THIS HAS NOT YET REACHED ALARMING PROPORTIONS, BUT NEEDS BE CHECKED NOW BEFORE IT GETS OUT OF HAND.

2. SOME ITEMS REFLECTING THIS ASPECT OF SADAT'S CURRENT MOOD MAY BE CITED:

(A) SADAT'S DECISION TO RECALL EGYPTIAN DELEGATION FROM JERUSALEM WAS TAKEN WITHOUT ANY CONSULTATION WITH US. HE REFUSED TO BUDGE EVEN AFTER A TELEPHONE CALL FROM PRESIDENT CARTER URGING HIM TO RECONSIDER. HIS OSTENSIBLE REASON THAT HE HAD ALREADY MADE ANNOUNCEMENT IS SCARCELY CONVINCING. HE COULD EASILY HAVE SAID THAT IN RESPONSE PRESIDENT CARTER'S CALL, HE HAD DECIDED KEEP DELEGATION THERE WHILE LONGER. THIS WOULD NOT HAVE GIVEN HIM PROBLEMS HERE.

(B) FROM VARIOUS PARTICIPANTS IN JANUARY 15 NSC MEETING, WE HAVE HEARD THAT SHARP CRITICISM WAS LEVELED AGAINST USG FOR FAILING TO DO WHAT WAS EXPECTED OF IT,
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ESPECIALLY ON THE ISSUE OF THE SINAI SETTLEMENTS. PRESIDENT CARTER'S PERTINENT STATEMENT OF JANUARY 14, ABOUT WHICH SADAT HIMSELF COMPLAINED, WAS APPARENTLY READ AS SIGNALLING AN UNDERLYING U.S. INTENTION TO PERMIT THE SETTLEMENTS TO REMAIN AND WAS BADLY RECEIVED.

(C) DURING SECRETARY'S VISIT, MRS. SADAT COMMENTED TO SEVERAL GUESTS ABOUT INCREASING EGYPTIAN PUBLIC CRITICISM OF THE USG IN THE WAKE OF THE BEGIN AND DAYAN STATEMENTS RE SETTLEMENTS. PERCEIVED ISRAELI INTRANSIGENCE IS BEING ATTRIBUTED TO LACK OF SERIOUS USG EFFORT PRESS ISRAEL REMOVE SETTLEMENTS EVEN THOUGH WE CALL THEM ILLEGAL.

(D) PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY SPEAKER, SAYED MAREI, ONE OF SHREWDIST POLITICIANS IN EGYPT, ASKED AMBASSADOR TO CALL, JANUARY 22, TO EXPRESS HIS "PRIVATE"CONCERN THAT SERIOUS STRAINS MAY BE DEVELOPING IN US/EGYPT RELATIONSHIP BECAUSE OF WHAT HE CALLED INADEQUATE SUPPORT FOR, AND EVEN HEDGING ON, PRINCIPLES TO WHICH WE PUBLICLY COMMITTED, E.G., WITHDRAWAL TO 1967 LINES WITH MINOR MODIFICATIONS, PALESTINIAN HOMELAND AND ILLEGALITY OF SETTLEMENTS. EQUALLY DISTURBING TO MAREI IS U.S. INTENTION TO CONCLUDE

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NEW, SOPHISTICATED MILITARY EQUIPMENT SALES WITH ISRAEL
AT A TIME WHEN EGYPTIANS PERCEIVE THE ISRAELIS TO BE
TOTALLY INTRANSIGENT. MAREI SAID THAT, WHILE HE DID
NOT KNOW WHETHER SADAT HAD BLUNTLY TOLD THE SECRETARY
OF HIS DISPLEASURE, WE SHOULD KNOW THAT PRESIDENT SADAT
IS UPSET ABOUT U.S. ROLE. IT IS AT TIMES CAUSING HIM
EMBARRASSMENT AT HOME AND IN ARAB WORLD. SADAT, ACCORDING
TO MAREI, CONTINUES TO REGARD PRESIDENT CARTER AS A
SINCERE AND WELL MEANING FRIEND, BUT IS CONCERNED AT
WHAT HE VIEWS AS VACILLATION AND UNDEPENDABILITY ON THE

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EXDIS (HANDLE AS NODIS)

JERUSALEM FOR USDEL ATHERTON

PART OF THE ADMINISTRATION IN THE FACE OF POLITICAL
PRESSURES. ASKED WHY PRESIDENT SADAT HAD PULLED THE RUG
OUT FROM UNDER USDEL AT THE VERY TIME IT WAS MAKING
PROGRESS IN DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES, MAREI SAID SADAT
HAD REACTED TO FONMIN KAMEL'S REPORT, AS CONVEYED
THROUGH VP MUBARAK, ON HIS MEETING WITH SECRETARY VANCE.
THAT REPORT, ACCORDING TO MAREI, HAD BEEN READ BY SADAT
AS PORTENDING A LESS ACTIVE USG ROLE THAN PRESIDENT
CARTER HAD LED HIM TO BELIEVE.

(E) PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY MEMBERS, INCLUDING STRONG
FRIENDS OF U.S., ACCORDING TO DR. LAYLA TAKLA, VICE
CHAIRMAN OF FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, ARE BECOMING
SHARPLY CRITICAL OF WHAT THEY PERCEIVE AS AN AMBIVALENT
U.S. ROLE AND ONE OF TRYING TO BE ALL THINGS TO ALL
PEOPLE. MAREI MADE SAME POINT.

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(F) FOR FIRST TIME IN MY RECOLLECTION, SADAT DID NOT GIVE IMMEDIATE POSITIVE REPLY TO THE SECRETARY'S OFFER TO PROCEED WITH NEGOTIATING A MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES EVEN AFTER SADAT HAD ADMITTED

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SOME PROGRESS HAD BEEN MADE. HE DID NOT HAVE TO CONSULT HIS NSC IF HE HAD NOT WISHED TO DO SO.

(G) VP MUBARAK TOLD AMBASSADOR LAST NIGHT THAT SADAT IS STILL IN A STATE OF DEPRESSION, ALTHOUGH HIS SPEECH OF SATURDAY WAS SOMETHING OF A CARTHARSIS FOR HIM. HE REPORTEDLY CONTINUES TO WORRY ABOUT THE UNCERTAINTY OF THE U.S. ROLE. (MAREI, INCIDENTALLY, ALSO CLAIMED THAT SADAT'S POSITIVE COMMENTS ON THE U.S. IN HIS SPEECH WERE PROMPTED BY REALIZATION THAT PUBLIC SENTIMENT WAS BEGINNING TO SWING AGAINST THE U.S. AND NEEDED TO BE REDRESSED.) SADAT IS STILL INACCESSIBLE TO PEOPLE.

3. ALL THESE INDICATORS SUGGEST THAT WE MAY HAVE AN INCIPIENT CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE WITH SADAT ON OUR HANDS. HE MAY NOT BE AS "WHIMSICAL" AS PRIMIN BEGIN SUGGESTS, BUT HE DOES HAVE SOME PECULIAR CHARACTERISTICS WHICH COULD COME INTO PLAY IN A SITUATION SUCH AS THIS. NOT THE LEAST OF THESE IS A TENDENCY TO CATEGORIZE INDIVIDUALS AND COUNTRIES IN EXTREMES. IF HE HAS CONFIDENCE IN AN INDIVIDUAL, HE WILL STAND BY THAT PERSON DESPITE THE CRITICISMS OF OTHERS AND EVEN ACTIONS TAKEN BY THAT PERSON WHICH HE VIEWS AS DELETERIOUS TO EGYPT; HOWEVER, IF FOR ANY REASON HE LOSES THAT CONFIDENCE AND COMES TO BELIEVE THAT PROMISES ARE NOT BEING KEPT, OR THAT HE IS BEING DUPED, THE PENDULUM SWINGS COMPLETELY THE OTHER WAY. ONCE THIS HAPPENS, IT IS EQUALLY DIFFICULT TO BRING HIM BACK TO A MORE RATIONAL JUDGMENT OF THE PERSON. THE SIGNALS WE ARE GETTING SUGGEST THAT SADAT'S CONFIDENCE IN PRESIDENT CARTER AND THE U.S. ADMINISTRATION HAS, AT A MINIMUM, BEEN SHAKEN BECAUSE OF PERCEIVED BACKING AWAY FROM COMMITMENTS THAT SADAT BELIEVES WERE MADE TO HIM.

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4. I WAS NOT PRESENT AT THE PRIVATE MEETINGS BETWEEN PRESIDENT CARTER AND SADAT AND AM NOT, THEREFORE, ABLE TO BE SPECIFIC ON WHAT ITEMS IN PARTICULAR HAVE DISTURBED SADAT. I AM ALSO PAINFULLY AWARE THAT, WHEN TALKING TO SADAT, THERE IS ALWAYS SOMETHING OF A COMMUNICATIONS

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PROBLEM. HIS ENGLISH COMPREHENSION IS NOT ALWAYS AS GOOD AS HIS ABILITY TO EXPRESS HIMSELF IN THE LANGUAGE WOULD SUGGEST. THUS, HIS UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT WAS AGREED UPON MAY SOMETIMES BE AT FAULT, BUT THE POINT IS THAT HE THINKS SUCH AND SUCH UNDERSTANDING WAS REACHED. TWO POINTS SEEM TO BOTHER HIM MOST AT THIS PARTICULAR TIME:

(A) HE IS BEGINNING TO SUSPECT THAT USG, DESPITE ITS STATEMENTS ON THE ILLEGALITY OF SETTLEMENTS IN SINAI AND ELSEWHERE, IS IN FACT LOOKING FOR SOME MID-WAY COMPROMISE WHICH WOULD ALLOW A RESIDUAL ISRAELI MILITARY AND CIVILIAN PRESENCE IN SINAI. AS HE TOLD PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY, A MID-WAY COMPROMISE WILL MEAN ISRAEL RETAINS SOME EGYPTIAN TERRITORY. BECAUSE OF THE WAY THE ISRAELIS HAVE PUBLICLY PLAYED THE SETTLEMENTS ISSUE, IT LOOMS TODAY AS A MAJOR POINT OF CONTROVERSY AND A TEST OF WHETHER SADAT CAN ACHIEVE A PEACE AGREEMENT WHICH REMOVES THE ISRAELIS FROM EGYPTIAN SOIL. SADAT'S DOMESTIC CONSTITUENCY, AND ESPECIALLY THE MILITARY, HAS STRONG FEELINGS ON THIS MATTER.

(B) FURTHER U.S. ARMS TO ISRAEL: WEIZMAN'S TELLING THE EGYPTIANS OF HIS UPCOMING TRIP TO THE U.S. TO NEGOTIATE F-16 AND FURTHER F-15 SALES HAS TROUBLED SADAT MORE DEEPLY THAN ANY PREVIOUS U.S. ARMS SALE TO ISRAEL IN THE PAST FOUR YEARS. HE IS CONVINCED THAT THE TIMING IS ESPECIALLY UNFORTUNATE AND WILL ONLY ADD TO WHAT HE PERCEIVES AS ISRAELI INTRANSIGENCE. IF USG INTENDS TO PROVIDE ISRAEL WITH MORE ARMS, MUBARAK (SADAT'S MOUTH-PIECE) HAS POINTEDLY NOTED, IT SHOULD AT LEAST TIE THIS

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EXDIS (HANDLE AS NODIS)

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TO ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL. SADAT HAS ALSO ASKED US FOR COMMENSURATE ARMS AND ANNOUNCED THIS TO THE PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY. THERE IS AN EXPECTATION THAT, IF WE MEAN WHAT WE SAY, WE SHOULD RESPOND.

5. TURNING POINT: I DO NOT WANT TO OVERSTATE SITUATION, BUT SIMPLY TO FLASH AN AMBER LIGHT OF WARNING AT THIS TIME. THE APPROACHES WE HAVE HAD MAY BE PART OF A CAREFULLY ORCHESTRATED CAMPAIGN TO PUT PRESSURE ON US, BUT THEY ARE MORE THAN THIS. WE MAY BE AT A TURNING POINT IN US/EGYPTIAN RELATIONSHIPS, WHICH HAVE FOR THE PAST FOUR YEARS BEEN STEADILY ESCALATING. WHILE SADAT STILL NEEDS US, AND WE ARE INDEED HIS ONE REMAINING SHEET ANCHOR, HIS DISILLUSIONMENT, IF UNCHECKED, IS BOUND ADVERSELY TO AFFECT OTHER ASPECTS OF OUR RELATIONS. LOOKING BACK OVER A GENERATION OF US/EGYPTIAN RELATIONS, MAREI AT LEAST BELIEVES THAT THIS MAY HAPPEN, AND ESPECIALLY IF WE DO NOT GIVE A POSITIVE REPLY TO EGYPTIAN ARMS REQUEST, WHICH HE SERIOUSLY DOUBTS THAT WE WILL DO.

6. WHAT'S TO BE DONE: WE HAVE ASSETS HERE, NOT THE
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LEAST OF WHICH IS SADAT'S DESIRE TO BELIEVE PRESIDENT CARTER AND THE U.S. ADMINISTRATION. PRESIDENTIAL LETTERS LAUDING SADAT AND PROMISING SUPPORT ARE HELPFUL, BUT NOT ENOUGH. HE HAS A TOUCH OF VANITY BUT IS CANNY ENOUGH TO SEE THROUGH THEM IF THERE IS NO SUBSTANTIVE FOLLOW-UP. WHAT MAY BE NEEDED IS A MORE DEMONSTRABLE EFFORT ON OUR PART THAT WE ARE SUPPORTING HIM IN FACT AND NOT JUST IN WORD. HE IS CONCERNED THAT WE, LIKE THE ISRAELIS, SHOW SIGNS OF TAKING HIS CONCESSIONS ON THE "NATURE OF PEACE" FOR GRANTED AND START FROM THERE TO FIND A MIDDLE GROUND. HE WANTS US NOT ONLY TO BE A MEDIATOR, BUT TO STAND UP FOR THE PRINCIPLES WHICH WE HAVE PUBLICLY PROCLAIMED EVEN IF IT MEANS ANTAGONIZING ISRAEL AT TIMES. IN THIS CONNEC-TION, THE SINAI SETTLEMENTS ISSUE IS A SOURCE OF PARTI-CULAR SENSITIVITY TO HIM AND ANY EFFORTS ON OUR PART TO PERSUADE THE ISRAELIS TO RELINQUISH THESE SETTLEMENTS

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WOULD DO MUCH TO RENEW SADAT'S AND EGYPTIAN CONFIDENCE IN OUR ULTIMATE INTENTIONS. SINCE A MORATORIUM IS ARMS SALES TO ISRAEL IS HARDLY FEASIBLE, SOME COMPENSATING ARMS ASSISTANCE TO EGYPT WOULD HELP. BUT IF WE ARE THINKING IN TERMS OF F-5E'S, WE SHOULD RECOGNIZE THAT THEIR IMPACT WILL BE LIMITED, SINCE THE EGYPTIANS ARE VERY AWARE OF THE DISPARITY OF CAPABILITIES BETWEEN THE F-16 AND THE F-5E'S. STILL, IT WOULD BE BETTER THAN NOTHING. ARRIVING AT AN ACCEPTABLE DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES, ASSUMING SADAT GIVES US THE GREEN LIGHT TO PROCEED (WHICH HE WILL) IS AN IMMEDIATE PALLIATIVE, BUT THE FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES TO HIM ARE THOSE CLOSER TO HOME MENTIONED ABOVE. EILTS

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